

Mostly South Essex 1970

By R. TOMLINSON

Any delay in this paper must be ascribed to the recent post office strike. Like many others, I should imagine, it is rather late in going to press. This notwithstanding, it has been one of the finest collecting seasons I have ever had, and I will plunge straight into it with the reader's indulgence.

My young friend Graham Glombek and I went to the local Coombe Wood in Langdon Hills on 24th March, set up the generator in a sheet operation there from 8.10 p.m. until 9.55 p.m. Only two of our target quarry came into our mercury vapour light. *Orthosia munda* Schiff., and I kept the both. Other species were what I had already obtained. We went there again with the light and sheet on 11th April, and had two fine examples of *Biston strataria* Hufn. Owing to my purchase of a motor cycle, Coombe Wood will feature again and again in this article, and places beyond.

The Robinson trap in my garden captured a melanic *Lycia hirtaria* Clerck on 18th April, with 11 other moths but all were released, the *hirtaria* being rather worn.

Out of 29 pupae, 24 *Saturnia pavonia* L. emerged between 1st and 4th May. These were from eggs laid by the female mentioned in my last account (*Ent. Rec.*, 82: 145).

Among 64 moths in my Robinson trap in my garden on the rainy night of 6th May was an ab. *fuscata* Tutt of *Menophra abruptaria* Thunbg., and another appeared in the trap on 19th May.

One of the first, and most satisfying field trips of the year was made to Fryerning Woods near Blackmore on 23rd May, with my friend R. Cook. We set the generator going with a 125 watt m.v. lamp over a white sheet, and we ran the light on this mild night from 10 p.m. to 11.30 p.m. Twenty-eight species of macros came in, six of them new to me: *Calocasia coryli* L. was the commonest moth, with *Cosymbia albipunctata* Hufn. a close second. We also had *Drymonia dodonaea* Schiff., *Notodonta trepids* Esp., *Trichopteryx carpinata* Borkh. and one *Rheumaptera cervinalis* Scop.

I made my next trip to Coombe Wood on 29th May with four members of the newly formed Basildon Natural History Society, and ran the m.v. light and a Heath trap from 9.35 p.m. until 12 midnight. Twenty-seven species of macros came in, including one *Lopophora halterata* Hufn. A day trip to this wood on 7th June resulted in my boxing an *Abraxas sylvata* Scop. from vegetation beneath a very large wych elm tree. Persistence had paid off, and at last I had discovered the whereabouts of this very local moth. This same night, my garden Robinson trap took a worn *Semiothisa notata* L.; this was its first record for me in this locality. A good specimen of *Selenia lunaria* Schiff. was in the trap on 9th June.

Another day trip to Coombe Wood on 16th June enabled

me to take another four *A. sylvata* from beneath the same wych elm as before. Among about 1000 moths in the garden trap this same night were one *Euchoeca nebulata* Scop. and one *Apatele leporina* L.

On 13th June I made a rendezvous with R. Cook at the "Halfway-House" just off the A.128 and went to Thorndon Wood near Brentwood, and ran the m.v light and the Heath trap from 10 p.m. until 12.15 a.m. in a promising area. Dusking produced several *Haplotis venustula* Hübn., and 25 species came to the sheet while 10 species were caught by the Heath trap. I kept seven moths among which were *Polia nebulosa* Hufn., *Macrothylacia rubi* L., *Ectropis extensaria* Hübn., and one micro.

The next day I led a field meeting in this area with the British Entomological and Natural History Society; an all day trip. The best capture of this expedition was a possible new species for Essex netted by R. Payne from ivy growing on Mucking church wall. At the moment Payne is sifting the literature to find out whether this fly is really a new record for Essex or not. A fuller report will appear in the society's journal later this year.

I made another visit to Coombe Wood, this time with my friend A. Cox, on 19th June and ran the mercury vapour light from 10.30 p.m. until 12.10 a.m. It was a clear night, but still and warm, and a full moon rose about midnight. It was a good night, and my small flask of Bourbon whisky never tasted so good. Thirty-six different species of macro came in including about two dozen *A. sylvata*. A welcome addition to my collection were two *Lithacodia fasciana* L. My garden trap on this night caught about 1000 moths including, perhaps surprisingly *H. venustula* and a *Hadena compta* Schiff.

The next field trip was with my friends Ron and Ray Pigney to the stamping ground of my tried friend G. Pyman at Little Baddow, on 20th June. We ran the m.v. light in Pheasant House Wood by the sphagnum bog, and the Heath trap elsewhere in the area from 10.40 p.m. until 1 a.m. There was no cloud cover but it was a still mild night. Collecting was very good indeed with no less than 64 species of macro coming in to the sheet. Geoff Pyman was with us, of course, and he agreed it was the best mothing night he had ever taken part in. The Heath trap which had been placed in the northern tree nursery, held about 100 moths of 17 different species. I kept 14 moths among which were *Semiothisa liturata* Clerck, one of which was ab. *nigrofulvata* Collins, and two *S. notata* L. one typical and one quite sooty specimen, of which Mr Huggins had never heard before. He urged me to take this and one or two other moths to the British Museum (Natural History) for them to check over. This I will do, and their subsequent findings will appear later on in the pages of this magazine. It may not be too much to hope that the dark *S. notata* is a new form.

This same night my garden Robinson trap held more than 1000 moths, of which I kept two, one *Deilephila porcellus* L.

and one *A. leporina* L.

My friend R. Cook drove over to me on the evening of 22nd June and said "come with me to Ham Street". I accepted at once, not having had the opportunity to visit this wonderful area before. We drove there and set up the generator in a promising looking drive and ran two lights from it, an 80 and a 125 watt bulb over white sheets from 10.10 p.m. until 1.15 a.m. The night was clear but fairly mild and we had 77 species at the sheet. I kept 15 moths which included *Apoda avellana* L., *Euphyia luctuata* Schiff., *Gryposia mesomella* L., *Atolmis rubricollis* L., *Miltochrista miniata* Forst., *Drymonaea dononaea* Schiff., and *Moma alpium* Osbeck.

I rode to Coombe Wood on 25th July on a fine sunny afternoon, and wandered along the paths; I succeeded in netting *Limenitis camilla* L. but this was chipped, so I released it. I did manage to net three fine *Stryminidia w-album* Knoch by a bramble patch in the wood.

Ray Cook and I drove to Chippenham Fen in Cambridgeshire on 27th June. We got there about 9.30 p.m. and set up the generator with 80 and 125 watt bulbs off one of the droves, in a place which reminded me very much of the "copper field" at Wood Walton Fen. As some light still remained we went dusk and caught several *Colostygia didymata* L. from a hedgerow on the fen approach. We ran the lights from 10.30 p.m. until 1 a.m. and 59 species of macros came in. Of course the prizes were *Eustrotia bankiana* Fabr., *Leucania pudorina* Schiff., *Meliana flammea* Curt. and *Phragmatoecia castaneae* Hübn.

The Pigneys and I ran the m.v light in Coombe Wood on the night of 3rd July for three hours and had 58 species of macro in to the sheet, the only new one for me being one example of *Cosmia pyralina* Schiff. A day visit to the same locality on the following day resulted in my boxing a *C. didymata* from the trunk of a large ash tree. This same night the garden trap caught an *H. venustula*, and I feel sure that it must occur somewhere locally, for I do not think that it is a moth which is to be found far from its haunts. This seems to bear out Mr Huggins's explanation that "the thing is spreading" and I hope I can find its locality here in 1971.

I went to Little Baddow on the evening of 1st August, set up the m.v. light in the hollow square formed by the Woodham Walker Common, Pheasanthouse Wood and Poors Piece Wood, most of the area being under the management of the Essex Naturalists' Trust, and therefore an important venue. G. Pyman, myself and four friends ran the light for over three hours. Fifty-eight species of macro arrived at the sheet, including *Parastichtis suspecta* Hübn., *Zenobia subtusa* Schiff., *Drepana lactertinaria* L. and *Harpyia bifida* Brahm.

On 9th August, Ray Cook and I drove in his car to the New Forest, booked in at the excellently appointed Forest Lodge Hotel in Lyndhurst. Cook being keen to start proceedings, we

wandered over the nearby heath adjoining the golf course, and I netted a male and a female *Plebejus argus* L. and a *Selidosema brunnearia* ssp. *scandinaviaria* Staud. That same evening we drove to a certain enclosure, set up the generator with a 125 watt bulb and white sheet, put the Heath trap further into the Forest, and also ran 52 sugar patches. We operated for three hours, and although it was a clear night it was fairly mild; moths were not prolific but we had a goodly number arrive at the sheet. Several rounds of the sugar produced nothing startling except two frogs and a toad at the foot of three sugared trees.

At the sheet, a *Catocala promissa* Schiff. came in and Cook promptly captured it saying "all it wants now is for one to come in for you", and immediately one flopped in right by me on the sheet, and I quickly boxed it. Other species from the sheet that night were one *Pachycnemia hippocastanaria* Hüb., two *Lymantria monacha* L., one *Amathes baja* Schiff., and from the Heath trap one *Hyloicus pinastri* L.

The next morning, 10th August, we were greeted with much rain. After breakfast, we drove to Minstead, where we called on L. W. Siggs whom we found pottering around in his greenhouse. He made us most welcome, and showed us his admirable collection and his methodical notes upon it; an object lesson, I thought, to all. We bade farewell to him and drove back to Lindhurst for lunch.

That evening, after a drink or two at the hotel bar, we went back to the same enclosure as the night before, and ran the m.v. light and Heath trap in positions different from those used the night before, and painted 25 sugar patches. The night was overcast, mild, though fairly windy. I had a nice *Lithosia deplana* Esp. soon on the sheet, and a welcome *Lampropteryx otregiata* Metcalfe from the Heath trap, but precious little else of note.

The next morning we drove to Beaulieu Heath, where I caught two *Eumenis semele* L. We then went to another enclosure, captured several *Argynnis paphia* L. but all were past their best. We found the same at Blackmoor Copse on our way to Tilshead, Wilts. Upon arriving at this village, we had a couple of beers at the Rose and Crown, heard from the landlord that he had seen "an old boy making a blue light up on the downs" and deduced that he referred to the late Captain R. A. Jackson running a light there. We knew then that we had come to the right place for the Brighton wainscot. Cook and I drove up a side road to the downs, chose a place to run the light between expansive corn fields, and ran the lights (m.v. and Heath) for over three hours. During this time we were treated to a proper firework display by the military with stars, tracer bullets and garish explosions further over on the downs. A rather weird backdrop to moth collecting, we thought. From the sheet, I kept two *Oria musculosa* Hüb. and from the Heath trap placed approximately 150 yards away three *musculosa* and three *Perizoma bifasciata* Haw.

We drove home most of the night pausing only for a short sleep at Virginia Water, arriving home at 7.15 a.m. on 12th August.

End of the season notables were a *Tiliacea citrago* L. in the m.v. trap at Mucking on 11th September, a *Lithophane semibrunnea* Haw. from there on 27th September, and one *Griposia aprilina* L. at light on a field trip to Little Baddow on 10th October. Thus ended my season 1970, a season in which I had added 44 new species to my collection.

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Incomplete development and reduction in quantity of scales occurring occasionally in specimens bred in captivity

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In a paper on hybridisation (Ent. Rec. Dec. 1970), I suggested that scales obtained from bred specimens might in certain cases be used in research provided it was known that such specimens were the progeny of wild-bred parents, not previously inbred for generations under unnatural conditions (l.c.p. 311). Actually it now appears that the use of scales derived from experimentally-bred specimens is not always to be relied on.

Recently, Mr S. R. Bowden and I had experienced difficulty in comparing the results of some observations so he kindly sent me a few of his microscopic slides to compare with my own. Among these were one of British *P. napi*, one of Swiss *P. bryoniae* and one of Scandinavian *P. adalwinda*, made from specimens he had bred at different times.

I examined the *P. napi* first and found a number of abnormal scales. The specimen was pure-bred, but showed some scales approximating those known in hybrids between that species and *P. bryoniae* but differing from such in being well-developed distally, but practically undeveloped in their proximal half. As I could not gain any information from this slide I turned to that of *P. bryoniae*. This was even more abnormal. There was not one typical *bryoniae*-scale in the mount, all were abnormal and undersized, so I turned to the *adalwinda* slide. Here again I met similar results. As the three specimens came from three different batches of larvae, some unnatural factor must have affected each.

The specimens were of the first generation forms (i.e. spring